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# *Openmindedness and Truth*

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*Abstract:* While openmindedness is often cited as a paradigmatic example of an intellectual virtue, the connection between openmindedness and *truth* is tenuous. Several strategies for reconciling this tension are considered, and each is shown to fail; it is thus claimed that openmindedness, when intellectually virtuous, bears no interesting essential connection to truth. In the final section, the implication of this result is assessed in the wider context of debates about epistemic value.

## §1 A CONUNDRUM

Openmindedness is puzzling. As Riggs (2004; 2010), Battaly (2004), Montmarquet (1993), Baehr (2011) and others note, it is a paradigmatic intellectual virtue<sup>1</sup>—one which is generally taken to occupy an intellectually virtuous Aristotelian ‘midpoint’ between credulity and dogmatism, and one that typically features, as Riggs (2010: 172) puts it, at the “top of any list” of the intellectual or epistemic virtues<sup>2</sup>. Plausibly, it will be all the worse for a theory of intellectual virtue that excludes openmindedness as a *bona fide* intellectual virtue; what a good account of the intellectual virtues must do is have some explanation for *what it is* in virtue of which openmindedness should be rightly regarded as an intellectual virtue<sup>3</sup>, and such a story must highlight a clear connection between the trait in question and some fundamental epistemic good or goods<sup>4</sup>. A

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<sup>1</sup> The claim that openmindedness is a paradigmatic example of an intellectual virtue—conceived of as a disposition—is not incompatible with recognizing that there might be some interesting occurrent psychological state that also fits the description of openmindedness.

<sup>2</sup> As Roberts & Wood (2007: 194) remark there are a range of more fine-grained vices that can fall under the banner of dogmatism, which they identify as doxastic complacency, stolid perseverance, perceptual rigidity, and comprehensional rigidity.

<sup>3</sup> Or, alternatively, a satisfactory diagnostic story for why we are led to error. This kind of position is examined in detail in §2.

<sup>4</sup> This connection has been articulated in very different ways. Montmarquet (1991) and Battaly (2004) for instance offer a motivational account of such a connection whereas Goldman a

perplexity is raised, however, in that unlike other paradigmatic intellectual virtues, openmindedness's connection to the epistemic good is fuzzy<sup>5</sup>. This is plain to see when we reflect on openmindedness as it relates to epistemic aim of believing truly<sup>6</sup>.

It is tempting to point out that many individuals who believe truly are openminded and reason from this observation that their possession of truths is in part *because* of their openmindedness. The idea of an exemplar judge comes to mind: an individual who disinterestedly evaluates evidence, without prejudice, and who has a disposition to give opposing arguments their due. Perhaps openmindedness is related to truth in that it is *truth-conducive*; openmindedness promotes the acquisition of true beliefs<sup>7</sup>.

This line of thinking quickly runs into problems. Although the idea of a wise judge is an idea that *includes* openmindedness, it also smuggles with it other intellectual virtues implicitly. We might try to avoid this problem by controlling for the other virtues by way of a *ceteris paribus* thought experiment—*viz.*, by holding fixed all other features of an individual relevant for the acquisition of

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reliabilist account and Driver (2003) a consequentialist account. Cf. Baehr (2011) for a 'personal worth' approach to this connection.

<sup>5</sup> Note that the claim that openmindedness is an intellectual virtue is compatible with the separate claim that it is also a moral virtue. Honesty is a good example of another trait that seems to qualify on both counts. In the discussion here, we are open to the thought that openmindedness is *also* a moral virtue, but our discussion is focused on the matter of how it should be account for *qua* intellectual virtue. Thanks to an anonymous referee at the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* for raising this point.

<sup>6</sup> Even if the view that truth is the sole fundamental epistemic good—epistemic value truth monism (cf. Pritchard 2009)—is false, we should still expect a straightforward connection between any intellectual virtue and the more general epistemic good of, as Cuneo (2007) puts it, "representing reality aright." The arguments motivated in this section apply as well to the aim, articulated more generally, of representing reality aright.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Kreeft (1986: 19) endorses such a view explicitly in his claim that "an open mind is therefore not an end in itself but a means to the end of finding truth" is simply "common sense". He appeals here (against the suggestion that it might ever be a good in itself) to Chesterton's claim that an open mind is like an open mouth in that it is good only to close down on something (*viz.* truth). There are two issues here that have to be distinguished. One is whether openmindedness is intrinsically valuable. Another is: in virtue of what to we explain the presumed epistemic value of openmindedness. These issues are often unhelpfully conflated. For instance, the view that the *epistemic* value of openmindedness is explained in terms of its instrumental value as a means to truth, *or any other epistemic end*, appears by Kreeft at odds with the kind of intrinsicist picture that Rorty (1989: 52) endorses in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* when he argues that "Openmindedness should not be fostered because, as Scripture teaches, Truth is great and will prevail, nor because, as Milton suggests, Truth will always win in a free and open encounter. It should be fostered for its own sake." It's important to note that even if Rorty were right that openmindedness is valuable *for its own sake*, this would not suffice for establishing that the properties in virtue of which it is intrinsically valuable are relevantly epistemic. So whether or not openmindedness is intrinsically valuable *does not* settle the question of whether we should explain openmindedness's status as a presumed *intellectual virtue* in terms of its connection with truth.

truth. This will be easy to generate; consider, as Roberts & Wood (2007) note, that openmindedness is often taken to stand opposed to *dogmatism*. We may then ask: *ceteris paribus*, is an arbitrary epistemic agent going to generate more true beliefs by being openminded or by being dogmatic? Unfortunately, even if the answer is *by being openminded*, the kind of connection established between openmindedness and truth would be at best conditional. This point can be made in two ways.

Firstly, to make things simple, let's consider a set of beliefs about the subject matter of physics. Call this set of beliefs *P*. Whether it is comparatively more truth-conducive to be openminded or dogmatic with respect to *P* depends on whether the beliefs in *P* are true. If they are (by and large) true, then *being dogmatic* has the upshot of making one resilient to giving up one's true beliefs and falling into error. If they are false, it is better to be openminded and accordingly more likely to be led from error. So whether openmindedness is *ceteris paribus* more truth conducive than the manifestation of dogmatism seems conditional upon what one already believes.

The second way to make this point will have us hold fixed what the individual in question already believes, when asking whether it is more truth-conducive (for two agents with all the same beliefs) to be openminded than otherwise. The answer again will be: it depends. Openmindedness (not unlike other intellectual virtues) is a disposition that contributes to the management of the beliefs we already have as well as to the manner by which we form new beliefs. In the case of belief-*forming* (as opposed to regulating), let's contrast openmindedness with credulity, rather than dogmatism: the openminded individual is less inclined than the credulous individual to accept the appearances uncritically and without suspicion. Whether openmindedness is, *ceteris paribus*, more truth conducive (for two same-believers) for the purpose of forming *new* beliefs is largely beholden to whether the environment is epistemically hospitable or epistemically inhospitable. Openmindedness affords no clear truth-related advantage over *uncritical* credulity if the environment is maximally friendly.

That openmindedness seems on the face of things only truth conducive in a way that is highly conditional is an observation difficult to square with our insights about other paradigmatic intellectual character virtues—such as intellectual courage and intellectual honesty. *Prima facie*, it would seem that intellectual courage and intellectual honesty help an agent get to the truth in a way that *doesn't* require special qualifications about what beliefs the agent already holds and what environment she is in. A plausible merit of any intellectual virtue is that it affords one the competence to adapt successfully across a spectrum of situations. In this way, intellectual virtues are not unlike the moral virtues.

That said, openmindedness *is* (on most any account of intellectual virtue) *a paradigmatic* intellectual virtue. And so a puzzle arises: how can we reconcile openmindedness's status as a paradigmatic intellectual virtue with the

observation that its truth conduciveness is highly conditional? Given its apparently tenuous connection with truth, why is openmindedness, as Riggs puts it, at the top of most everyone's list of intellectual virtues?

## §2 FATALISM AS A WAY OUT?

The puzzle motivated in the previous section dissolves, of course, if it turns out that openmindedness is *not* an intellectual virtue after all, or at least, not an intellectual virtue in a way that vindicates our ordinary attributions of it. These intuitions, championed by (among others) Roberts & Wood and Baehr, conceive of openmindedness as a 'global' trait that stands *prima facie* connected to (and not merely accidentally conducive of) the intellectual good and, furthermore, always or almost always distinguishable from the vices of dogmatism and credulity<sup>8</sup>.

A position that denies this will constitute a kind of 'error theory' or fatalism about the thesis that openmindedness is a (global) intellectual virtue and would, accordingly, require some corresponding diagnostic story for why we have been led to such error

In this section, we will examine two (very different) such lines that might be advanced to this end. The first such line draws from empirical psychology and has been advanced most enthusiastically in recent work by Mark Alfano (2012; 2013)<sup>9</sup>. The second line draws from a kind of 'intellectual flaccidity' case considered by Roberts & Wood.

### §2.1 'Situationist'-based fatalism

Alfano's critique of intellectual character virtues (including openmindedness) can be best understood as an extension, in epistemology, of Harman's<sup>10</sup> and Doris's situationist critique of global moral virtues<sup>11</sup>, where the underlying idea was that evidence in moral psychology shows that situational factors play a more significant role in moral agency than can be accommodated on a view according

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<sup>8</sup> This is the kind of picture taken on board by, for instance, Roberts & Wood (2007) and Baehr (2011). Thanks to an anonymous referee at the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* for helpful recommendations on this point, and more generally, this section.

<sup>9</sup> See here also Olin & Doris (2013).

<sup>10</sup> For example, Doris (1998) and Harman (1999). For a classic piece of social psychology connected to the situationist challenge as presented to virtue ethics, see Milgram (1974). Additionally, consider here Harman's remark, in criticising virtue ethicists who posit robust character traits to explain behaviour: 'We very confidently attribute character traits to other people in order to explain their behaviour. But our attributions tend to be wildly incorrect and, in fact, there is no evidence that people differ in their character traits. They differ in their situations and in their perceptions of their situations. They differ in their goals, strategies, neuroses, optimism, etc. But character traits do not explain what differences there are.' (Harman 1998-99, §8)

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Doris has also considered an extension of his critique of moral virtues to intellectual character trait virtues. See here, for instance, Doris (2005: 659).

to which character traits are supposed to be playing the kind of explanatory role virtue ethicists need them to play.

That said, virtue *responsibilist* (as opposed to virtue reliabilist) accounts in mainstream knowledge attempt to analyse knowledge as broadly cognitive successes (e.g. true beliefs) that are the product of intellectual character traits (as opposed to mere reliable faculties). Accordingly, as Turri (2013: 4) notes, ‘...to the extent that virtue ethics rests on a mistaken characterological moral psychology, virtue responsibilism probably rests on a mistaken characterological moral psychology...’ And this is the crux of line Alfano (2012, 2013) has taken in arguing that responsibilist virtue epistemologists, according to which intellectual virtues are understood as ‘motivational and reasons-responsive dispositions to act and react in characteristic ways (e.g., open-mindedness, curiosity, intellectual courage, etc.<sup>12</sup>’, cannot explain cognitive successes in the way that is postulated by responsibilist versions of virtue epistemology<sup>13</sup>.

Interestingly, though, the most comprehensive recent defences of responsibilist approaches to intellectual virtues (e.g. Roberts & Wood (2007; Baehr (2011)) do *not* attempt to analyze *knowledge* in terms of intellectual virtue, and so won’t be subject to Alfano’s ‘knowledge-skeptical’ *reductio* that such virtues can’t adequately explain knowledge<sup>14</sup>.

But that said, there’s more to Alfano’s argument; he takes it that--given the import of (non-epistemic) situational factors on intellectual task performance--it’s hard to see how intellectual character virtues of the kind of *generality* they are traditionally taken to enjoy are going to have the kind of epistemic *value* they’re widely taken to have, unless construed in a highly local way.<sup>15</sup> (2012: 247).

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<sup>12</sup> See Alfano (2012: 224). An exception here is Zagzebski (1996) who analyzes knowledge in terms of intellectual virtues understood along broadly responsibilist lines.

<sup>13</sup> Turri (2013) nicely captures, in a pithy way, a survey of some of the situational factors noted by Olin & Doris (2013) that put pressure on the thesis the intellectual character virtues will be explanatorily salient. Turri writes:

<sup>13</sup>‘We’re less likely to recognize someone’s face after working on difficult crossword puzzles than reading; we overestimate distances and upward angles when tired or carrying heavy equipment; we’re worse at judging distances in hallways than in a field; we’re more likely to accept a written claim as true when it’s easy to read; we’re more likely to judge someone credible who speaks quickly; we’re more likely to think that easy to pronounce stocks will outperform difficult to pronounce ones. Add to these the more familiar biases and foibles with names — the availability bias, the confirmation bias, the anchoring bias, the false consensus effect, base rate neglect, the conjunction fallacy — enumerated in textbooks on judgment and decision making’. (Turri 2013, 6-7).

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that Baehr explicitly denies that intellectual character traits could fruitfully be put in the service of analysing propositional knowledge.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, openmindedness, in context C, with non-epistemic situational factors S1 and S2 present. Such highly localised traits would be, according to Alfano, ‘minimally admirable’ (*Ibid.* 247).

Is fatalism, motivated in this fashion, the way out of the puzzle? Obviously, a natural rationale for a *negative* verdict here is to point out that Alfano's argument indicates merely that openmindedness (conceived generally, as a global virtue) is *rare*. But compare here with wisdom: if it turned out that wisdom were rare, this would not undercut our original insight that wisdom is as epistemically valuable as we thought.

But even if we granted that rarity would in some way undercut the original insight, there's additional reason to resist Alfano's insistence the openmindedness (construed globally, not locally) would be even so rare as he thinks. Perhaps openmindedness would be rare if Alfano is correct in thinking that it is an example of what he calls a 'high-fidelity' virtue; high-fidelity virtues require, as he puts it 'near-perfect consistency'. Compare here thoroughness: Alfano claims that 'if someone acts in accordance with thoroughness 80% of her inquiries, that hardly makes her thorough'. That seems fair enough. However, he lumps openmindedness in the category of thoroughness (*Ibid.* 246), and in contrast with 'low-fidelity' virtues (e.g. creativity, insight, originality) which require less consistency. As he remarks 'If someone has an original insight even once a week, that might qualify her as insightful'.

Alfano recognises it is *high-fidelity* virtues and their 'near-perfect consistency' requirement that are *primarily* placed under pressure by the kinds of empirical psychological evidence he is drawing from. While this is not the place to evaluate the situationist critique *vis-a-vis* intellectual character virtues *tout court*, it's fair to say that, in the absence of empirical evidence about situational factors and open-mindedness *specifically*<sup>16</sup>, coupled further with reason to think openmindedness (*qua* global trait) requires near-perfect consistency--a point that seems highly suspect<sup>17</sup>--we have no good cause to think the puzzle sketched in the previous section can be set aside *simply* on the grounds of an *empirically* motivated fatalism about openmindedness. More would have to be shown.

## §2.1 A different argument for fatalism

<sup>16</sup> Alfano's pet examples do not involve openmindedness.

<sup>17</sup> Consider, for one thing, that openmindedness (unlike, say, inspiration) seems most plausibly manifested as a response to certain obstacles (e.g. Baehr 2011). The proposal that openmindedness requires near perfect consistency in response to the relevant kinds of obstacles does not strike us as well motivated. Consider here, as Turri (2013) has, the case of Ted Williams, who was (arguably) the best at hitting baseballs, though he aspired nowhere close to near-perfect consistency; his lifetime batting average was .344. On the plausible assumption that openmindedness like other character virtues can be possessed in degrees, it is mysterious why openmindedness should require such a high level of consistency that one simply fails to possess this virtue if (say) one engages in openminded inquiry .80 of the time in the relevant circumstances. As the Williams case shows, what is especially relevant here is plausibly the *baseline* against which one counts as reliable or not in a given kind of endeavor. In baseball, hitting .300 is reliable. The burden is with Alfano to insist why the relevant baseline must be so much higher in the case of openmindedness. Thanks to Allan Hazlett for helpful discussion on this point.

There is, however, a different way to make the fatalist case. Julia Driver (2003), in the context of discussing the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, concedes that, ‘if it turns out that [for example, in the moral case] honesty does not have the good effects we think it has, then it may well be that it is not a moral virtue. This seems highly unlikely, but it is possible’ (2003: 116). The resulting view would be a kind of error theory or fatalism about the widespread judgment that honesty is a moral virtue<sup>18</sup>. Extrapolating from this idea, we might try to make some logical space for a kind of fatalism about openmindedness as an intellectual virtue, and on the basis of it’s having effects different from what we assume it to have.

Now the observation in §1 that the connection between openmindedness and truth seems at best tenuous is certainly *compatible* with fatalism about openmindedness as an intellectual virtue, but it wouldn’t go far toward positively motivating such a view. Let’s consider how one might try to do so. A starting point might be the observation, drawn by Roberts and Wood (2007), as well as Baehr (2011), that certain traits we are inclined to refer to under the heading of “openmindedness” are not intellectually virtuous, but rather, instances of intellectual *vice*. Consider here Roberts & Woods’ example of a student taking her first introductory course in philosophy:

... she treats the survey as a smorgasbord at which she partakes with an appetite. Within a course of sixteen weeks she may have been a Platonist, an empiricist, a skeptic, a Cartesian, a Kantian, a utilitarian, a social contractor, a mind-body-dualist, a Berkeleian idealist, a reductive materialist ... she commits quickly to each theory, easily relinquishing its contrary, then passing on to the next. She is bright, but under the pressure of successive presentations of ideas, her intellectual character is too soft to hold onto a position (Baehr 2011: 140/Roberts & Wood 2007: 188)

This case, which Roberts & Wood use to illustrate what they call “intellectual flaccidity<sup>19</sup>” leads Baehr (2011: 141) to claim:

I see no reason to think that *any* trait that can aptly be labelled “openmindedness” must be an intellectual virtue. Nonetheless, it is

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<sup>18</sup> Driver, of course, does not actually endorse such a view.

<sup>19</sup> C.S. Lewis (1944) also takes objection to intellectual flaccidity, under the description of an objectionable kind of openmindedness, in *The Abolition of Man*, though for separate reasons than those Roberts & Wood consider. “An open mind, in questions that are not ultimate, is useful. But an open mind about the ultimate foundations either of Theoretical or of Practical Reason is idiocy. If a man’s mind is open on these things, let his mouth at least be shut. He can say nothing to the purpose. Outside the Tao there is no ground for criticizing either the Tao or anything else” (Lewis 1944: 48).



extremely plausible to think there exists a genuine and important intellectual virtue in the neighbourhood of these traits.

This is surely right. But it also shouldn't be surprising. After all, for any presumed virtue  $V$ , it would be wrongheaded to think that the following conditional holds: if  $V$  is a paradigmatically recognized as a virtue, then we ought to be able to explain why *any* manifestation of character that could be sensibly described under the heading of  $V$  is virtuous<sup>20</sup>. An endorsement of such a conditional generates an implausible kind of virtue skepticism<sup>21</sup>. But, only if such a conditional is true, should we worry that there is no intellectually virtuous form of openmindedness to vindicate our attributions of it as an intellectual virtue *because* intellectual flaccidity, which might be described as a kind of openmindedness, is not intellectually virtuous. Maybe some other argument for a kind of fatalism about openmindedness as an intellectual virtue could be defended. We don't anticipate what such a plausible argument here would look like. At any rate, we'll proceed (for the most part, uncontentiously) in taking ordinary convictions at face value and, accordingly, it will be assumed that openmindedness—under some substantive description—is an intellectual virtue (and so will be in some way *prima facie* connected with the epistemic good).

### §3 BAEHR'S NEW APPROACH

So, the puzzle we began with can't be simply dissolved by denying the platitude that openmindedness, suitably described, is among the intellectual virtues. In this section, we consider an attempt to account for the relationship between openmindedness and truth that has been defended recently by Baehr (2011). Our guiding question, by way of reminder, is: how can we reconcile openmindedness's status as a paradigmatic intellectual virtue with the observation that its connection to truth is (or, at least, appears) highly contingent?

To appreciate the move<sup>22</sup> Baehr (2011) makes, consider first the general characterization of openmindedness he offers:

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<sup>20</sup> Compare: something like intellectual courage is surely an intellectual character virtue; but what of intellectual courage in the service of uncovering pointless truths (perhaps, at a great practical cost)? Activity characteristic of intellectual courage needn't be intellectually virtuous when not tempered by (for instance) good judgments about what end is worth pursuing.

<sup>21</sup> Few virtues after all would satisfy this criteria; this is so especially given that the norms governing our ordinary standards for applying the term are in certain situations relaxed due to pragmatic or other contextual reasons. On this point, consider how pragmatic considerations influence our tendency to apply the term 'hero' to individuals.

<sup>22</sup> The solution is undergirded by Baehr's wider move: to explain the epistemic value of intellectual virtues not directly in terms of their connection to (e.g. their conduciveness of) some epistemic end, such as truth, but rather—and in a way that draws from Hurka's work on moral virtue—in terms of the intellectual virtue's contribution to what he calls an individual's personal intellectual-worth.

*Openmindedness*: “An open-minded person is characteristically (a) willing and (within limits) able (b) to transcend a default cognitive standpoint (c) in order to take up or take seriously the merits of (d) a distinct cognitive standpoint” (2011: 152).

As a general characterization of openmindedness, this seems perfectly plausible. Though a general characterization of openmindedness is insufficient, *per se*, in resolving our puzzle about openmindedness and truth. This is because (as we saw) openmindedness isn’t *always* intellectually virtuous; we need then an account that specifies when it is. Baehr (2011: 161) offers one:

*Virtuous openmindedness*: “A person S’s engaging in the activity characteristic of open-mindedness under circumstances C is intellectually virtuous *only if* it is reasonable for S to believe that engaging in this activity in C may be helpful for reaching the truth...”

Although Baehr gives only a necessary condition here, this affords all he needs; after all, in offering the necessary condition, Baehr has specified a connection that an agent’s engaging in an activity characteristic of openmindedness *must* bear to truth in order to be intellectually virtuous. Though, in order to better understand how Baehr is taking openmindedness to be intellectually virtuous (when it is) because of its connection to truth, we need a more concrete account of the conditions under which it counts as “reasonable” for S to believe that engaging in C may be helpful for reaching the truth. Accordingly, Baehr (2011: 161) unpacks the reasonableness condition as “a function of the comparative strength of S’s grounds concerning:

- (1) P itself;
- (2) S’s own reliability relative to the propositional domain to which P belongs; and
- (3) the reliability of the source of the argument or evidence against P”

Interestingly, the concept of truth features in Baehr’s account of the conditions under which openmindedness is intellectually virtuous, but it does so *not* (as the virtue reliabilist<sup>23</sup> would have it) directly, *qua* an end such that the

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<sup>23</sup> Virtue reliabilists (e.g. Goldman (1999), Sosa (1993)) insist that, if any trait is to qualify as an intellectual virtue, then the manifestation of this trait must be connected to truth in a specific way: by being *reliably truth-conducive*, e.g. the trait is epistemically virtuous iff it reliably brings about true beliefs (and the avoidance of error). This articulation of the connection a trait must bear to the fundamental epistemic good (e.g. truth) to qualify as an intellectual virtue stands opposed to the account of this connection offered by *virtue responsibilists*. Virtue responsibilists

*maximization* of that end is what makes openmindedness intellectually virtuous. Truth features in Baehr's account more subtly; an activity characteristic of openmindedness is intellectually virtuous, in some circumstance, only if (rather than by being simply truth-*conducive*) a belief *about the activity's being helpful for reaching the truth* (in those circumstances) is reasonable. This move offers a kind of way out of the original puzzle. We simply say, following Baehr, something to the effect that: we were never wrong in supposing there is an intellectually virtuous sort of openmindedness, nor were we wrong in expecting that there be some connection (that is *not* highly contingent) between openmindedness and truth that will help to explain openmindedness's status as an intellectual virtue. What led to the puzzle was the false assumption that the connection must be a direct kind of connection; the connection is, rather, indirect.

This is an elegant solution. However, the solution runs into a kind of intractable problem; specifically, Baehr's account of the conditions under which virtuous openmindedness is reasonable invites a vicious sort of regress<sup>24</sup>. The regress is motivated by a simple observation, which is that: one fails to be openminded in C, vis-a-vis P, if not also, at the same time, open-minded *about*

- (1) P itself<sup>25</sup>;
- (2) S's own reliability relative to the propositional domain to which P belongs; and
- (3) the reliability of the source of the argument or evidence against P.

Suppose, for reductio, that S is openminded, in C, vis-à-vis P, but (say) dogmatic as concerns (1-3). Perhaps such a supposition is not even possible. But, if this is right, then a regress looms: for S to be openminded about (1-3), it would also, by reference to Baehr's account of *virtuous openmindedness*, have to be reasonable for S to think that being openminded about whether (1-3) would be helpful for reaching the truth (about 1-3), and *this* reasonableness will be a function of a further (1\*-3\*), about which S would have to be openminded in order to be openminded about (1-3), and so on, *ad infinitum*.

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often reference the characteristic motivation associated with the trait in question; so the relevant connection with truth for this family of views can be accounted for in motivational terms as opposed to reliability. We engage in some detail with motivationalist views in the next section. For more detailed discussion of the distinction between virtue reliabilism and responsibilism, see Baehr's (2004) "Virtue Epistemology," IEP Entry, Sec. 4 "The Reliabilist/Responsibilist Divide" <http://www.iep.utm.edu/virtueep/>. Cf. Axtell's (2000) introduction to *Knowledge, Belief and Character*.

<sup>24</sup> See also Carter (2013).

<sup>25</sup> It is a matter of some controversy just how being openminded *vis-à-vis* some proposition (e.g. the proposition *P* itself) constrains one's doxastic attitude with respect to that proposition. But for our purposes, we needn't take a stand. For discussion on this issue, see Spiegel (2012) and Adler (2004), as well as Riggs (2010).

While the regress is plausibly motivated by reference to (1-3), the argument could be motivated by a weaker claim—*viz.*, that being openminded in C, vis-à-vis P entails being openminded with respect to *any* of (1-3), for example, just (1): *P* itself. But it is hard to see how one could block the regress by denying this weaker argument that gets it off the ground. Could one ever be (for instance) openminded in C, vis-à-vis P while (say) dogmatic about P itself? This seems manifestly absurd<sup>26</sup>.

#### §4 A MOTIVATIONALIST ACCOUNT

Perhaps, even if we can't explain openmindedness as an intellectual virtue by reference to its reliably securing us true beliefs, we might explain it as such along the following lines: openmindedness is intellectually virtuous because truth-seeking (as opposed to truth-generating) is characteristic of openmindedness. The gist of this idea is expressed succinctly by Marcus Aurelius in his suggestion that "If someone is able to show me that what I think or do is not right, I will happily change, for I seek the truth, by which no one was ever truly harmed."<sup>27</sup>

Battaly (2004: 35) articulates<sup>28</sup> this insight:

What makes open-mindedness, so construed, an intellectual virtue? What makes it an intellectual, rather than a moral, virtue is its *motivational component*. Even though it need not track the truth, it is characterized by a *motivation for truth*<sup>29</sup>.

Battaly's view is that openmindedness is an intellectual virtue partly because it is "an entrenched habit that expresses the agent's epistemic values" (*Ibid.* 35). Riggs (2008) refers to the kind of epistemic value conferred in this way as *teleological value*, which is value something has "by virtue of being aimed at something else of value" (2008: 21).

One (albeit, indirect) way to advance the view that virtuous openmindedness is characterized by a motivation for truth would be to generate a kind of *reductio* for the view that intellectual virtues must be reliable. The

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<sup>26</sup> On a plausible interpretation, the claim featuring in the weaker argument (framed in terms of just (1)) is of the form (Being openminded in C, vis-à-vis P entails being openminded, in C, *vis-à-vis* P), which is tantamount to (*P*∧*P*) and so is a logical truth.

<sup>27</sup> *Meditations* §VI, line 21.

<sup>28</sup> While Battaly endorses a characteristic-motivation style of explanation for openmindedness as an intellectual virtue, she parts ways with more robust motivationalists, such as Montmarquet, by allowing that certain virtues might require have a reliability requirement, *rather* than a motivational requirement. So she parts ways with any uniform kind of explanation that is exclusively reliabilist, exclusively motivationalist, or, pace Zagzebski's (1996) neo-Aristotelian account of intellectual virtue, exclusively always *both*.

<sup>29</sup> Our italics.

motivational account can then be presented as the most plausible alternative (and certainly more plausible than fatalism).

Such a reductio against a uniform reliability requirement on intellectual virtue is offered by Montmarquet (1993) and rehearsed by Battaly (2004) and Riggs. Montmarquet (1993: 21) motivates the reductio as follows:

[I]f we are to appraise the relative worth or “virtue” of epistemic agents by the truth-conduciveness of their intellectual dispositions, then how are we to accommodate the approximate *equality* of epistemic virtue we find in such diverse agents as Aristotle, Ptolemy, Albertus Magnus, Galileo, Newton, and Einstein? From our current vantage point, we recognize these thinkers as differing greatly in the truth of their respective beliefs and systems of belief... How can such rough equality in virtue be reconciled with this verifical diversity?<sup>30</sup>

Montmarquet’s line here against a reliability condition on intellectual virtue simpliciter can be recast in terms of openmindedness, specifically: plausibly, Aristotle<sup>31</sup> and Einstein, as intellectually virtuous agents *par excellence*, exhibited openmindedness to a similar degree. Though, as Riggs (*Ibid.* 2011) notes, “a great deal of Aristotle’s science and philosophy was mistaken. It may even be that he was wrong about more of these things than he was right.” But then, to the extent that openmindedness is intellectually virtuous *by way of its truth-conduciveness*, the openmindedness exhibited by Aristotle and Einstein must not be equally intellectually virtuous. But, as the argument goes, this is surely mistaken<sup>32</sup>. Battaly (2004), in her discussion of the case, goes a step further to suggest that:

... I would not deny Aristotle the virtue of open-mindedness even if the *vast majority* of beliefs that it produced in him were false. Presumably, there are lesser-known historical figures of whom this is the case.

Perhaps Ptolemy is an example of such a figure--the fundamental claims of Ptolemy’s treatise on the cosmos, the *Almagest*, are (with the exception of his

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<sup>30</sup> This passage is also cited in Riggs (2003: 211).

<sup>31</sup> We thank an anonymous referee for pointing out that although Aristotle’s intellectual virtues were many, there are some reasons to doubt that openmindedness was one he manifested consistently (e.g. his controversial views on women, slaves and the appropriate role of the poor in politics.) We follow Battaly, Riggs and Montmarquet in using Aristotle as an example here, but the reader is free to substitute Aristotle for Socrates or another appropriate figure.

<sup>32</sup> Riggs (*Ibid.*: 211) takes the requirement that a theory of intellectual virtue not exclude the intellectual giants as a “criterion of adequacy for a theory of intellectual virtue.” He adds that “any theory of intellectual virtue that does not *clearly and definitively* count the likes of Aristotle, Newton, Galileo, etc. as being intellectually virtuous does not capture what we mean by “intellectual virtue.””

assertion that the earth is a sphere) false. In any case, it seems Battaly's verdict here would extend in principle to a kind of new evil demon scenario—viz., a scenario wherein it is suggested that the openmindedness exhibited by a demon-world-occupying Ptolemy is no less intellectually virtuous than the openmindedness Ptolemy's counterpart exhibits in a world indistinguishable from the demon world but where the majority of the beliefs afforded to him by the trait are true. If Montmarquet and Battaly are right, then the extent to which Ptolemy and his demon-deceived counterpart are virtuous in their openmindedness does not track the extent to which they believe truly, but tracks rather their virtuous (truth-aimed) motivation we've held fixed across worlds. Evaluated along *this* dimension, they will of course be on a par, regardless of reliability—which is precisely the intuition Montmarquet thinks we should have (more generally) in his intellectual giants case.

#### §5 THE PROBLEM OF POINTLESS TRUTHS

The motivationalist line offers us then a new style of reply to the original puzzle: the connection between openmindedness and truth is tenuous only along the reliability dimension; however, the connection is tight insofar as we look at the characteristic *motivation* of virtuous manifestations of openmindedness. Here, we find a characteristic aim of believing truly—and so, in this respect, the connection between openmindedness and truth is not tenuous after all. The puzzle dissolves.

Unfortunately, under closer consideration, this proposal turns out to be no more promising than the other strategies we've considered. To see how, consider whether there might be some truths that would be completely pointless to believe? Here's Sosa:

At the beach on a lazy summer afternoon, we might scoop up a handful of sand and carefully count the grains. This would give us an otherwise unremarked truth, something that on the view before us is at least a positive good, other things equal. This view is hard to take seriously. The number of grains would not interest most of us in the slightest. Absent any antecedent interest, moreover, it's hard to see any sort of value in one's having that truth. (Sosa 2000: 156)

The problem of pointless truths is a philosophical problem for philosophers who wish to contend that the epistemic value of truth is unrestricted<sup>33</sup>. An even more extreme way to capture the point Sosa is making here will have us imagine an agent, Sansa, whiling away her days in the following way: she starts out with a true belief, “P<sub>0</sub>” and generates disjunctions, each which she then believes. “P<sub>0</sub> or P<sub>1</sub>”, “P<sub>0</sub> or P<sub>1</sub> or P<sub>2</sub>”, ... P<sub>0</sub> or P<sub>1</sub> or P<sub>2</sub> or ... P<sub>n</sub>”. Sansa is generating a new true belief

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<sup>33</sup> See here Kvanvig (2008) and Carter (2011).

each time she believes the next disjunction. But is Sansa generating epistemic value? Plausibly, she is not<sup>34</sup>.

While it falls well outside the present purposes to try to *resolve* the problem of pointless truths (e.g., by resolving the tension between insights like Sosa's and the claim that the epistemic value of truth is unrestricted), there is a closely related kind of problem that threatens a motivationalist vindication of openmindedness as an intellectual virtue, in terms of truth. And, unlike the most general kind of objection to motivationalist accounts—*viz.*, that one can be maximally intellectually virtuous with all false beliefs—the pointless-truth style objection we'll now raise doesn't beg the question against the proponent of a reliability condition. Consider the following case:

Victor suffers from a unique version of Asperger's Syndrome. Like many individuals with Asperger's, Victor has a narrowly focused obsession. Victor, persuaded (for better or worse) by the motto that truth is the greatest good, wishes to believe as many truths as possible over the course of his life. Recognizing that the truths will not simply come to him, he reasons that he must therefore dedicate his life to pursuing inquiries. But which ones should he pursue? Guided by his fierce desire for maximizing truth, he decides the most practical plan will not be to simply follow his nose, as it were, but rather, and in a comparatively more organized way, to identify a specific (suitably large) set of inquiries and then to pursue each inquiry in that set in a way that is maximally intellectually virtuous. Openmindedness is an intellectual virtue, he reckons, and so he is openminded (in the service of gaining truths) in *each and every* inquiry he pursues over the course of a lifetime that is characterized (almost exclusively) by the motivation of believing truly. The set of inquiries Victor decides to pursue is "Everything that happened in Kuntsevo, Russia in the 20-year span between 1934 and 1954." The inquiries in this set are (say) as dense as the real numbers and so, given his goal, this set of inquiries will serve his purpose as well as any other set of inquiries he might have chosen. Victor racks up a remarkable number of true beliefs over the course of his lifetime, all of which are true beliefs about what happened across a 20-year span in Kuntsevo. Accordingly, Victor's stock of beliefs is constituted exhaustively by these and only these true beliefs.

Now, consider that the motivationalist account, in so far as it is limited to an explanation in terms of *truth*, is going to be committed to the position that Victor's openmindedness is *maximally* intellectually virtuous for the following reason: his openminded pursuit of *every inquiry he pursued over his life* (in a life

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<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the best discussion on this problem is Kvanvig (2008). Kvanvig suggests that the claim that the (epistemic) value of truth is unrestricted can be upheld, in light of (apparent) pointless-truth cases, so long as we recognize the unrestrictedness claim as a *defeasible* claim that is subject to both overriding and undercutting defeaters.

*dedicated* to truth) was maximally *motivated* by the aim of truth<sup>35</sup>. From the motivationalist's perspective, Victor is unimpeachable. And this is so even when we reveal another feature of Victor's story: that, once he selected *which* set of inquiries to pursue, he was dogmatic on the matter of whether to pursue any others. Victor accordingly was *not* open to pursuing (for instance) questions about ethics, science, politics, mathematics and human history, for their own sake.

The reductio to the motivationalist account of the relationship between virtuous openmindedness and truth takes shape: Victor's openmindedness is not epistemically impeccable<sup>36</sup>; that he was dogmatic about which inquiries to pursue speaks to an important respect in which his openmindedness was epistemically impoverished. He is robbed, for instance, of the sort of broad understanding of the world that an intellectually virtuous agent should strive to achieve. His openmindedness also expresses his epistemic value (truth) in a way that is insensitive with respect to any distinction between significant and pointless truths. Accordingly, maximally virtuous openminded agents will be openminded in a way that manifests not *only* in the manner in which they pursue the inquiries they pursue, but also at the level of selecting which inquiries are worth pursuing; they will not cut themselves off from understanding the world, as Victor does<sup>37</sup>. But, by way of emphasis, the motivationalist proposal lacks the resources to explain how or why Victor's openmindedness, which manifested *only* at the level of inquiry pursuit, could ever be more virtuous than it was. And it is plain to see how the motivationalist's verdict would be the same were Victor to have chosen an even less epistemically valuable set of inquiries: inquiries into various relations that stand between Sosa's grains of sand on the beach.

## §6 CONCLUSION: EPISTEMIC VALUE PLURALISM?

The results from §§1-3 indicate that openmindedness, when intellectually virtuous, bears no interesting *essential* connection to truth. But if that's right, then we're in a position now to consider a very different kind of reply to the original puzzle. Notice that the original observation was puzzling only because it is often assumed, following Goldman (1999: 41-46), that "epistemology is a

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<sup>35</sup> Note that the Victor case is *not* meant to count against a motivationalist proposal that is not restricted to explanations of intellectual virtue in terms of their connection to *truth*, specifically. Thanks to an anonymous referee on this point.

<sup>36</sup> For instance, Victor *could* have also been open to pursuing (say) more general fundamental questions, but as he is simply not open to these (as they fall outside his restricted purview of inquiry) it would not be right to say his openmindedness is impeccable; there is room in this regard for improvement. Thanks to a referee for requesting further discussion here.

<sup>37</sup> Compare here with a case where Hitler is highly openminded in his pursuit of truths concerning the promotion of the Aryan race (which is, suppose, the only truths he pursues). Here Hitler would be openminded in a highly restricted way, and in a way that is far from impeccable. Any view that would be committed to viewing Hitler as maximally openminded would be implausible. Thanks to a referee for requesting further discussion here.



discipline that evaluates...along truth-linked (veritistic) dimensions”. On one interpretation of this claim, it is a claim about what epistemology *is*, and so a criterion for evaluation being epistemic, *per se*. In taking this assumption for granted (e.g. that epistemic evaluation is truth-linked evaluation), we expect the epistemic goodness of openmindedness with reference to which it is intellectually virtuous must be somehow explicable in terms of its connection to truth<sup>38</sup>. But if, as has been suggested here, no such explanation looks plausible, then we’re faced with a dilemma: (i) either we revisit the fatalist position about the status of openmindedness, suitably defined, as a genuine (global) intellectual virtue<sup>39</sup>—or, (ii) reject Goldman’s assumption by rejecting *epistemic value truth monism* (EVTM), the view that (roughly) truth is the sole fundamental epistemic good<sup>40</sup>.

It’s not as easy to reject EVTVM as one might think. Pritchard, for instance, dismisses one kind of obvious objection to EVTVM: “Aren’t there lots of other epistemic goods beside true belief, such as knowledge, justification, rationality etc.,? Well, yes, but the thought is that what makes these goods *epistemic* goods is that they are a means to true belief” (Pritchard 2008: 2; our italics). To reject EVTVM is to reject an elegant account of epistemic value, one that must be replaced by some other theory of epistemic evaluation. It’s beyond our aim here to defend such a replacement account. But we think that the examination of openmindedness here leaves a rejection of EVTVM as the only viable way out of the original puzzle for any philosopher hoping to vindicate (rather than deny) openmindedness’s status as an intellectual virtue.

What the discussion here suggests is, specifically, that there must be epistemic ends, *other* than truth, whose epistemic value isn’t *explained* solely by

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Lynch (2009) for another kind of motivation for epistemic value truth monism (EVTVM). On Lynch’s view EVTVM falls out of an observation about the nature of belief, which is that, *prima facie*, beliefs are correct iff true. Insofar as inquiry is a practice of forming beliefs, Lynch reasons that by engaging in the practice of inquiry one thereby assents to recognizing the value that governs the practice, and for the practice of inquiry—which consists in forming beliefs—that value is truth. Hence, for Lynch, one is committed to recognizing truth as the value that governs inquiry just by engaging in inquiry at all. See also Shah (2003) and Wedgwood (2002) for representative defenses of the view that belief aims at truth.

<sup>39</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out that the suggestion that openmindedness is only tenuously connected with truth would force one to abandon either epistemic value truth monism or the position that openmindedness is a global intellectual virtue in the sense articulated in §2. Cf. Morton (2013) and Lepock (2011) for alternatives to the global thesis that (if accepted) needn’t have this implication. However, for a further point of clarification: because we take it that the motivating insight that leads openmindedness to be considered a paradigmatic intellectual virtue is the insight that openmindedness suitably globally construed is an intellectual virtue (this is the approach pursued by Roberts & Wood (2007) and Baehr (2011)) we have proceeded with this conception in mind.

<sup>40</sup> Note that the same dilemma could be forced were it to turn out that some other paradigmatic intellectual virtue is not such that its status as a intellectual virtue could plausibly be explained vis-à-vis its connection with truth. Cf. here intellectual courage as a potential candidate. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this point.

reference to the value of truth, with reference to which we will have to explain what makes openmindedness virtuous, when it is. Candidate aims, and ones which have been pursued in different ways include understanding (e.g. Riggs 2004; 2008, Pritchard 2010; and Kvanvig 2003) and wisdom (Whitcomb 2010 and Sosa 2011<sup>41</sup>). Of course, it will not be so easy as to say, for instance, that EVTm is false because (for instance) Victor (while maximally hooked up with the truth) lacks understanding and wisdom, while appearing nonetheless epistemically defective. A further thesis must be defended to the effect that the value of (say) understanding and wisdom is distinctly epistemic, and moreover, that the epistemic value of understanding and wisdom really isn't explicable in terms of the value of truth. And, to stress, proper engagement with these questions requires some kind of stance on the issue of what makes any evaluation epistemic. These aren't problems we will attempt to solve here. However, we have contended that closer attention to one specific intellectual virtue—openmindedness—gives us reason enough to abandon what is otherwise a deeply entrenched picture of the role of epistemic evaluations in epistemology.

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<sup>41</sup> According to Sosa (2011) we can think of *wisdom* as, at least in part, a function of selecting the *right* inquiries, inquiries that are worthwhile to pursue. On Sosa's view, wisdom is a special kind of cognitive achievement, one that consists in not merely hitting a cognitive success through cognitive ability, but even more, possessing the second-order ability to select the right epistemic targets.

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